

6 The Single Woman, the Spinster

On 26 June 1703, Ferdinando Maria Nicoli from Bologna wrote in a letter to Carriera:

I don't know who it was who said: what good luck for a painter to have so virtuous an artistic emulatress for a spouse; to which he replied that, in order to properly find her match, one would have to resuscitate Signor Guido Reni.¹

Nicoli's words convey a form of recognition quite in keeping with the tradition of artistic competition. Coming from Bologna, home of the and highly regarded painter Guido Reni (1575–1642), this comparison was doubly flattering to Carriera. Yet Nicoli touches on the artist's celibacy, an aspect of her private life that was often a topic of discussion among her contemporaries and biographers. Not only did Carriera's resolute choice mean swimming against current conventions as well as finding a role and an identity for a social group not officially acknowledged to exist, but it also entailed renouncing the predefined role of the wife who receives financial and social support, and protection from her husband. It was a decision that carried along with it certain threats.

As Adrienne Ward has stated, even with fathers present,

unmarried daughters of a certain age embodied the nexus of several potential instabilities, risks to domestic and communal order. They could compromise family honour, disrupt estate succession, confuse relations between families, and stain community morality.²

It is worthwhile examining not only the consequences but also the possible reasons behind Carriera's decision not to enter into marriage, and to take a closer look at the social network which she constructed for herself to compensate for the loss of the system that excluded her as a single woman.

As in her career, Carriera chose independence in her private life, remaining alone and never marrying. It was a choice that made her part of a tiny minority of the society she lived in. Fewer than 10 per cent of eighteenth-century women remained spinsters.³ Nevertheless, among the group of female artists she took on a quite

1 'Vi fu un non so chi che disse: che fortuna d'un pittore che havesse una sì virtuosa emola dell'arte per consorte; a cui egli ripigliò che bisognava, per ben accoppiarla, far risuscitare il Sig.r Guido Reni.' Sani, 1985, I, 68.

2 Ward, 2018, 236.

3 Regarding the question of whether marriage represented an advantage or a disadvantage for women artists between 1500 and 1600, see Borzello, 2000, 65–73.

representative role as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries produced a striking number of female painters who also remained unmarried, such as Giovanna Garzoni (1600–1670), Chiara Varotari (1600–1660), Maria van Oosterwijck (1630–1693), Elisabetta Sirani and Giulia Lama, to name just a few.⁴ And in Carriera's case, her decision never to enter into marriage was certainly not due to a lack of offers or opportunities. Malamani (1910), for example, is convinced that despite her allegedly plain appearance, the painter was attractive to men thanks to her inner beauty and her talents:

In spite of the exterior flaws of her person, she elicited genuine passions among men, which, much more than the fleeting splendor of beauty, attach themselves to and nourish themselves in the light of the soul and of invention.⁵

But more specifically in her case, being the firstborn and thus heiress of the family and at the helm of a thriving family business enterprise she could have been a desirable property.⁶ In fact, until the beginning of the eighteenth century, Carriera's contemporaries would still take into consideration that she could have a relationship, which finds expression in the letter from Ramelli and dated 3 June 1706. He advised the artist not to travel to Germany, reminding her how difficult she would find it to leave her mother and sisters behind. To make matters worse, he noted, the country was at war, and the climate, the different customs and the foreign language would all make a sole journey arduous and burdensome. Nor was he persuaded to sanction the trip by the possibility she might be considering marriage:

I do not suppose you are considering marriage candidates and, in this case, I do not believe that such could be missing—someone better suited to you, more sober and in a country more agreeable to one and the other.⁷

Evidently, Ramelli does not preclude the possibility of Carriera marrying at this point, even though she had already reached the age of thirty-nine.

As for her close friend Anton Maria Zanetti, Carriera's contemporaries were uncertain of the role he played in her life. He was in constant contact with Carriera, visited her frequently in her home on the Grand Canal, went on excursions to view art with her wherever they stayed together, and accompanied her to evening events such as

4 Borzello, 2000, 65. For a more complete list of unmarried women artists from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century see ffolliott, 2016, 19.

5 'Malgrado i difetti esteriori della persona, suscitò fra gli uomini vere passioni, le quali, molto più che nello splendore fugace della bellezza, trovano presa e alimento nella luce dell'anima e dell'ingegno.' Malamani, 1910, 98.

6 In the context of Carlo Goldoni's *La Locandiera*, see Ward, 1990, 236.

7 'Je ne pense pas que vous songiez à un parti d'un mariage et, en ce cas là, je ne crois pas qu'il vous en manque, avec quelqu'un qui vous soit plus propre, plus sobre et dans un pays à meilleur gré de l'un et l'autre.' Sani, 1985, I, 97.

concerts, operas and theatre performances.⁸ It was the same Zanetti who followed Carriera, her sisters and her mother on their successful trip to France in 1720. As a result, he was regarded by mutual friends not only as a loyal and close companion but as a family member in the Carriera household, though the exact relationship between the two was never clearly defined; perhaps it did not need to be – almost as though he was already a husband of sorts.⁹ The question as to whether her close friend was simply a ‘Platonic admirer’¹⁰ remains unanswered, but to date there is no evidence of a true love affair. To what extent Zanetti entertained hopes of entering into a partnership – and ultimately marriage – with Carriera, is no longer possible to know for certain.

It is however possible to name at least one of Carriera’s potential suitors: Christian Cole. The first secretary of Lord Manchester corresponded regularly with the artist, and it was he who took great pains to have her admitted to the *Accademia di San Luca* in Rome. Over and over again, he offered her his assistance and support in any shape or form. One is struck by the great energy he invested in procuring the right pastels for Carriera. The frequency of the letters he sent to the artist bears witness to his considerable, sustained efforts on her behalf. In one of his letters, dated 22 September 1704, he wrote:

With particular joy, I received your very kind [missive] of the 27th Sept. I thank your Signora for the news it contained and I am very much obliged for the disappointment she was willing to express for not having been able to come above the Brenta. [...] at the same time, I wish for her correspondence and should she need something I can send from here, I desire her orders.¹¹

Just ten days later, he was in touch again, this time from Rome, writing full of hope and enthusiasm:

My latest was of the first of this month, whereupon I received the honour of your letter written that same day. There is something sympathetic in this. I am glad that they are enjoying themselves so well in Venice and I am sorry that I cannot be present at each of their amusements and in particular in the company of my honoured patroness.¹²

8 See for example the letter Carriera sent to Crozat in December 1723, in Sani, 1985, I, 442.

9 Barcham, 2009, 153.

10 Sensier, 1865, 411.

11 ‘Con singular contento, ho ricevuto la sua gentilissima de 27 7bre. Ringratio a la sua Signora per le nuove che contenga e sono obligatissimo per il dispiacere ch’ella ha ben voluto mostrare per el non haver potuto vernire sopra la Brenta. [...] in quel mentre desidero la sua corrispondenza e ha besogna de qualche cosa, ch’io poterò inviare di qua, desidero il suo comando’. Sani, 1985, I, 82.

12 ‘La mia ultima era del primo de questo mese, doppo questo ho ricevuto l’honnore della sua scritta in el medesimo jorno. C’è qualche simpatia in questo. Me n’allegro che loro se divertano tanto ben in Venetia et mi dispiace che non poterò esser presente in tutti loro divertissamenti et in particolare in la compagnia della mia honorata patrona.’ Sani, 1985, I, 84.

He provided her with gifts of all sorts, showed himself as the always available and helpful friend who was truly attached to the artist. On 10 January 1705, one can sense in his letter his fear of losing Carriera:

I have also sent a print of the Knight Charles Morat, it is but a trifle, but I hope that you will receive it as a little token of proof of the very great esteem in which I hold you. If you should have other orders or should want other things from Rome I hope that You will honour me with your requests. I beseech you not to interrupt your very dear correspondence.¹³

Not long after this, negotiations with the art academy began, and, on 31 March 1705, he wrote that he had just talked to the secretary of the institution expressing great confidence that Carriera, owing to his efforts, would soon become a member: ‘and then I will have you admitted there.’¹⁴

He repeatedly told Carriera how important her letters were to him – which was, in effect, an indirect plea for continuing their correspondence. The fact that he constantly reassured her of not missing a single opportunity to promote her cause almost seems like a form of unconscious blackmail to make Carriera write to him more frequently.¹⁵

But Cole gave even clearer evidence of his feelings in a letter of 1 September 1707 that went beyond their friendship:

Because I wished to see Venice again principally to see you again, all seems dead to me during your absence. [...] You could not begin to comprehend how interesting I find anything which concerns you, and I see that you do not want to believe me when I explained the friendship, not to mention other things, which I feel for you. I pray you believe at least that I am dying to see you again.¹⁶

Following this, something must have happened between Cole and Carriera; possibly ‘those other things’ were too much for the painter. In the last of his letters to her, his tone is more serious, and considerably more sober and distant:

13 ‘Ho inviato ancora una stampa del Cavallier Carlo Morat, è una bagatella, ma spero ch’Ella la riceverà come una piccola prova della grandissima stima ch’io porto per Ella. Se ha qualche altre ordine o che vol altre cose de Roma spero ch’Ella me honorerà sempre delle sue comande. La conjuro di non discontinuare la sua cara corrispondenza.’ Sani, 1985, I, 86.

14 ‘e poi io la farò entrare là.’ Sani, 1985, I, 87.

15 Sani, 1985, I, 87–88.

16 ‘Comme je désirais de revoir Venise principalement pour vous revoir, tout me paroît mort pendant vostre absence. [...] Vous ne sçauriez comprendre combien je m’intéresse dans tous ce que vous regarde, et je vois que vous ne voulez pas croire quand je vous explique l’amitié, pour ne pas dire autre chose, que j’ay pour vous. Je vous prie de croire au moins que je meure de vous revoir.’ Sani, 1985, I, 118.

I am sorry that I did not have the good fortune to see you before your departure. I came Saturday morning, early, to the house of Your Ladyship where I was told that you had left Friday evening. [...] I hope you will return soon and that you will have painted the portrait for Florence.¹⁷

Even if we do not have the respective letter from Carriera, it would appear that she rejected him, letting him know that she had absolutely no intention of entering into any relationship with him, let alone marrying him.

Carriera's exemplary reply to an anonymous admirer shows that she knew very well how to react in such a situation:

Seeing as my having to leave home delays the honour of our being able to converse, I have resolved to write to say that you have caused me a wonderful surprise. Your Lordship could easily have indicated to me what you represented to your friend and thus avoid my blushing from seeing that I had inconvenienced him for something which was not worth his trouble. He spoke of you in such a fine manner that he would have persuaded me, were I less distant than I am from any inclination to alter my style of living. My employment, which greatly involves me as well as a rather cool nature, has always kept me away from love and thoughts of marriage. I would make the world laugh heartily, if now that I have already spent my youth, I should embark upon these. Giovanna, who has nourished a disposition equal to mine in withdrawing from all meetings and commitments, knows of this matter; but she will remain silent, as I wish your friend will do, too, and that you should believe, without feeling any offence, that I could never be anything other than your Devoted and Most Obligated Servant.¹⁸

The artist's reply is clear, leaving virtually no room for misunderstandings or further discussion. At the same time, one gets a distinct impression that she had fashioned a niche for and an image for herself, both of which offered her, on various levels, advantages, opportunities and freedoms that would not have been open to her had

17 'Mi dispiace che non ho avuto la fortuna di vederla avanti suo departo. Son venuto sabato mattina a buona hora a casa di V. S.ra ove m'hanno detto che venerdy sera Ella era partita. [...] Spero che in breve Ella tornerà e che haverà fatto il ritratto per Fiorenza.' Sani, 1985, I, 122. He presumably alludes to Carriera's self-portrait for the Grand Ducal collection in Florence I discuss below.

18 'Vedendo che il dover sortire di casa mi differisce l'honor di poter parlare, rissolvo scrivere per dirle che mi ha fatto una gran sorpresa. V.S. poteva bene palesar a me ciò ch'ha rappresentato al suo amico e sottrarmi al rossore di vederlo incomodato per cosa che non meritava la sua pena. Egli ha parlato per lei con tanto di buona maniera, che mi avrebbe persuasa, quando fossi stata meno aliena di quello sono da ogni inclinazione di mutar sistema di vivere. Il mio impiego, che troppo m'occupa ed un naturale assai freddo, m'han sempre tenuto lontana dagli amori e pensieri di matrimonio. Farei ben ridere il mondo, s'hora, ch'ho già passata la gioventù, entrassi in questi. Giovanna, che sempre ha nudrito un genio uguale al mio di sottrarsi ad ogni incontro ed impegno, sa questo affare; ma tacerà, così bramo che faccia il suo amico et che lei, senza offendersi, creda, che non potrò ai essere, che sua Dev.me et Obb.ma Serva.' Sani, 1985, II, 753.

she married. Playing on the gender stereotypes of her time, she consciously propagated an unattractive picture of herself as a busy, inflexible and cold woman, the stereotype of an old spinster.¹⁹

This carefully constructed masquerade offered her both liberty and a potent shield,²⁰ while one consequence of her efforts to construct this stereotypical image was that others presumed her to be a virginal celibate woman who lived the exemplary life of a 'holy' painter. It is hardly a coincidence that Carriera was commonly linked with sainthood, and it is truly remarkable to note the extent to which others used religious vocabulary and ideas in relation to the artist.²¹ D'Argenville talked of a higher calling, given from God's reign: 'but Heaven had destined her for more elevated things',²² which is a particularly interesting comment as divine inspiration and genius were generally gendered notions. It was unusual that a contemporary biographer of a female artist would use these terms in connection with her gifts and her talent.²³

Also Giovanni Francesco Zamboni, the personal physician of the Elector Palatine in Düsseldorf, used comparisons, metaphors or allusions to the religious sphere considering her hands divine and therefore capable of making miracles.²⁴

When one of the most celebrated female portrait painters in Britain in the eighteenth century, the Scotswoman Katherine Read, was travelling back from Rome to London, she visited her by then blind colleague in Venice in 1753 and compared Carriera's ideas to those of angels.²⁵ 'As far as I am concerned, I consider you a person filled with inspiration and with truly beautiful and angelic ideas.'²⁶

19 Also Shearer West has noted: 'Her presentation of herself as a weak-willed spinster dedicated to her family ironically allowed her certain freedoms that were outside the reach of her male counterparts.' West, 1999b, 49. Or further below: 'The diligence and virtue she and her correspondents invested in her personality was in no small way tied up with her unmarried status and her alleged unattractive appearance.' West, 1999b, 52. The phenomenon of the secular spinster appeared around the second half of the sixteenth century; V. Cox, 1995, 528. Concerning the tradition of this unappealing spinster image in eighteenth-century literature and how it is caricatured in the nineteenth century, see Adams, 1996, 883.

20 'Witch hunts in Europe had placed women in fear that if they were not viewed as holy virgins, chaste mothers, or good wives, or as nurses and teachers, they would be seen as prostitutes or promiscuous and evil witches.' De Girolami Cheney et al., 2009, 68–69. Cox points out that the unprecedented figure of the secular spinster appears by the second half of the sixteenth century; V. Cox, 1995, 528.

21 See also West, 1999b, 53–55.

22 Translation by Dabbs, 2009, 344. The original text reads: 'mais le Ciel l'avoit destiné pour des choses plus élevées.' Dézallier D'Argenville, 1762, 314.

23 Dabbs, 2009, 340.

24 Sani, 1985, I, 350.

25 On Read's life and career see *Pastels & Pastellists: The Dictionary of Pastellists before 1800*, ed. by Neil Jeffares, www.pastellists.com/articles/Read.pdf (accessed on 8 August 2018). In 1751, she copied Carriera's pastels, which were part of the famous collection belonging to Cardinal Alessandro Albani (1692–1779) in Rome; see Whistler, 2009, 202–3.

26 The original text of her letter to Carriera dated 31 May 1756, reads: 'Pour ce qui me regarde, je vous considère comme une personne remplie d'inspiration et d'idées vraiment belles et angéliques.' Sani, 1985, II, 732.

Similarly, Suor Maria Beatrice Davia wrote in a letter from Modena to Carriera of 3 March 1731:

Blessed be the hand that has handled the brush so well in outlining so well the Holy Image of the Divine Saviour, for he is so beautiful as to seem alive and with an air of Paradise; tell me, have You seen our Lord in some rapture of the spirit?²⁷

The pastel she had received from Carriera seemed to her the result of an ecstasy, a spiritual experience often associated with female saints. Divine intervention was also used as a metaphor by Crozat when he wrote on 19 December 1732, thanking her for her particularly well-executed half-length figure she had sent him: '[It] appears to have been made by the hands of an angel rather than by a human being.'²⁸

And her supporter and friend Mariette raised her not only to the level of an angel but directly to the status of a goddess where he wrote: 'You appear a heavenly woman or an earthly goddess.'²⁹ Just like Benedetto Berner who, after having opened the box in which he saw one of Carriera's pastels, exclaimed: 'Goddess, oh! Goddess! This is not like that poetic fairy tale but eternal truth.'³⁰ It reminds us of a comment of Ferdinando Maria Nicoli that extended beyond imputing spiritual ecstasy, to praise her to the heavens and quite literally compare her to God himself, as quoted previously.³¹

An analogous tendency to describe Carriera with religious vocabulary can also be found in early secondary literature. In 1885, Alfred Sensier calls her *casta diva* (chaste goddess).³² Malamani addressed Carriera in 1910 as a 'vestal virgin of art', who thanks to her independence is able to preserve her 'holy flame'.³³ Hoerschelmann describes Carriera's diary theatrically as the 'sanctuary of a great soul',³⁴ calling the artist herself, whose name, she says, is always surrounded by a halo, the 'high priest of the ideal of beauty of her time.'³⁵

My idea that Carriera deliberately instrumentalized her status as an unwed woman by acting out and diffusing the image of a fragile and modest holy spinster is further supported by some surviving private documents.

27 'Sia benedetta quella mano, che ha così bene maneggiato il pennello per delineare così bene la Santa Immagine del Divino Salvatore, ma così bello che pare vivo et ha un'aria di Paradiso; mi dichi, ha Ella veduto il Signore in qualche rappimento di spirito?' Sani, 1985, II, 541.

28 'Sembler estre fait par les mains d'un ange plutost que par un home.' Sani, 1985, II, 570.

29 'Tu sembles une femme céleste ou une déesse terrestre.' Quoted by Hoerschelmann, 1908, 15.

30 'Dea, oh! Dea! questo non è come quella favola poetica, ma eterna verità.' See Sani, 1985, I, 341.

31 See also Giorgio Maria Rapparini, who spoke of Carriera in connection with heresy, less in terms of her art and rather in relation to her decision not to be married. See Sani 1985, I, 172. See also the definitive description of the three Carriera sisters as 'prestantissime vergini' by Felice Dalla Costa; Sani, 1985, II, 575, n. 1.

32 Sensier, 1865, 411.

33 Malamani, 1910, 98.

34 Hoerschelmann, 1908, 299.

35 Hoerschelmann, 1908, 307.

In a letter she wrote to Crozat in 1721, the artist clearly reinforced the impression that she used the alibi of having, as a woman, a position vaguely associated with weakness – in this instance to evade a second trip to France:

Nor do I suppose I will see Paris again, as I am female and not male, otherwise, among other things, I would have, perhaps, so much will and resolution that I could better come to know so beautiful a royal residence and so worthy, polite and likeable a nation.³⁶

And on some occasions even her contemporaries became incredulous regarding an attitude that was occasionally too ostentatious. Don Bartolomeo Sampellegrini for example accused Carriera of using and exploiting to her best advantage the fact that she was a woman. In a letter of 18 August 1731, he wrote from Rome that he had been glad to hear of her intention to come to the 'eternal city' – an intention, however, that unfortunately turned out to be a false rumour:

but it is surely true that you do not have that great desire which you say you have to see it [Paris] for if you did, the mere fact of being a woman would not prevent you from undertaking the trip which is not even the trip to Vienna: I do not wish to proceed further into this matter, limiting myself solely to protesting toward you all my sincerest affection.³⁷

As he knew that she had stayed in Vienna the year before, her bogus argument that she would not travel because of being a female did not at all appear convincing to him.

But apart from the debates regarding her reluctance to leave Venice, it was primarily Carriera's decision to remain unmarried that evidently represented for her contemporaries something of a dilemma. It was the same dilemma that Elisabetta Sirani had previously provoked in Bologna by remaining unwed while at the same time rejecting 'a life of saintly reclusion [in favour of] a public active professional one, and this was pushing the boundaries of acceptable female behaviour.'³⁸

In order not to push the boundaries too much and not to ruin her carefully constructed image, the single woman Carriera had to behave in an impeccable way, and that included another tactical move, that is to downplay or veil the success of her

36 'Né pure io mi lusingo di riveder Parigi, perché femina e non maschio, altrimenti, per altro, avrei forse, quanto chi che sia volontà e risoluzione, per venire meglio conoscere così bella regia e così degna, polita ed amabile nazione.' Sani, 1985, I, 411.

37 'è ben però vero, che lei non ha quel gran desiderio, che dice d'avere, di vederla che se tal fosse, il mero essere di donna non gl'impedirebbe d'assumere un viaggio, che non è poi quello di Vienna: io non voglio avanzarmi più oltre in questo particolare, restringendomi solo a protestarle tutto il mio più sincero affetto.' Sani, 1985, II, 559–60.

38 Modesti, 2014, 33.

professional life. Fame and glory or ambition and success were dubious goals or qualities for a woman at the time,³⁹ and Carriera, accordingly, made sure that she followed societal expectations of a modest and humble lady. This further, somewhat curious aspect becomes evident from an analysis of her correspondence: her business letters do not contain personal details, and interestingly, they rarely refer directly to money issues. She presented herself to the world as a woman who takes care of her family, and who focuses on her idealized, purified work, untouched by baser motives. It seems she consciously played down as far as possible any interest that she, as an independent artist, would have had in earning money and therefore a living. Crude, common monetary concerns do not fit in with her image, so are ignored.

Even though Carriera's commissioners regularly asked in their letters to let them know how much they owed the artist, hardly any of her answers have survived. It would appear that the artist did not make (or have made) any copies of the letters in which she must have given more precise details regarding commercial transactions. And she was not alone in the display of this attitude, as it was part of a widespread idea of a 'noble belief system that money spoils the purity of art, even though in reality painters became rich, famous, and noble through the commerce of art.'⁴⁰ As there was, indeed, a stigma attached to the notion of a woman earning money from art,⁴¹ the idea of remaining 'pure' was far more important for a female artist than for her male colleagues. Talking money did not suit a woman, and for an artist like Carriera it was just as delicate an issue. The only lines we can find in her correspondence regarding her expenses inform the commissioner (and consequently ourselves) that she wrote the requested amount on the paper in which she wrapped the artwork.⁴² The fact that this was indeed a well-considered strategy becomes evident when one looks at Carriera's diaries, in which financial affairs play a far larger role, and which often contain minute details regarding money issues.⁴³

Another way of maintaining perfectly acceptable behaviour for a woman within the mores of the art market was the use of gifting.⁴⁴ It implied an exchange based on a social code masquerading the monetary aspect. As Sohm stated:

Gifting relied on a belief, where both buyer and seller are complicit, that selling paintings was not mercantile but an exchange between equals, where payment was never discussed but only assumed to be forthcoming based on the generosity and social standing of the patron. Art and the artist are thus cleansed of demeaning associations with the lucre of trade and hence the taint of commodification

39 See Goodman, 1989, 332.

40 Sohm, 2010a, 13.

41 Murphy, 2007, 28–29.

42 See for example Sani, 1985, I, 357.

43 See also West, 1999b, 51–52.

44 Goldthwaite, 2010, 288.

and craft. The artist is not a craftsman or businessman but a purveyor of beauty and ideas. Art transcends economic value. It is priceless, as Pliny the Elder concluded regarding Zeuxis' gifting practice.⁴⁵

And also Carriera, who was an inventive promoter and clever marketer of her work, benefited enormously, both financially and socially, from this form of exchange.⁴⁶ In a great number of letters that make up her business correspondence we read about the most varied gifts that she received, including artworks, clothes, tea, chocolate, a watch and even a relic.⁴⁷ In one specific case, we read that again she deliberately refused to tell her client Etienne Mack the price which made him reply:

I would be the happiest person if I could hold a treasure in my hands, but the point is that you would not at all tell me the price, and you are right as your works are priceless: so I will not miss finding something for you that is witness of my gratitude, you have seen it with the portrait of my wife, and I will not fail to do the same for mine.⁴⁸

His lines not only prove that this kind of payment was normal practice but also show that in reality, 'gifting did not escape the logic of commercial exchange [as] the value of the respective gift was precisely calculated in monetary terms and entered as a business expense.'⁴⁹

In her situation of being an independent female painter, it was vital for Carriera not to become the object of gossip and scandal. Only too easily did women artists of her day become victims of slander, especially the ones who specialized in portraiture, finding themselves caught in a paradox. On the one hand, the genre was associated with them, and on the other it was a 'potentially dangerous employment' as the activity of a female portraitist entailed the encounter between the artist and her sitter; and if the client was male, the session could turn into a problematic professional pursuit implying an intersubjective exchange of glances that went against societal conventions and expectations. As Angela Rosenthal describes in her revealing article: according to the European ideal of femininity, constituted by notions of domestic, private virtues, and culturally regulated through conduct books, literature and other media, a decent woman

45 Sohm, 2010b, 228.

46 See Sohm, 2010a, 13, and Ago, 2010, 269. Guido Reni was famous for refusing to talk about the price of a commissioned painting in the certainty that the client, once he/she received the finished product, would reward him generously. This behaviour has been called a marketing technique to raise the demand for and therefore the price of his work. Goldthwaite, 2010, 288.

47 See Sani, 1985, II, 505.

48 'Moy je serais le plus heureux de posséder un trésor entre mes mains, pour ce qu'il s'agit de ce que vous ne me marquez point de prix, vous avez raison, car vous ouvrages sont impayable: pourtant je ne manquerai pas de vous trouver quelque chose pour vous témoigner ma reconnaissance, vous l'avez vû pour le portrait de ma femme, et je ne manquerai pas d'en faire de même pour le mien.' Sani, 1985, II, 557.

49 Ago, 2010, 268.

could not direct a prolonged searching look at a man without impropriety. That is, women who did not conform to such cultural limits were excluded from polite society, and considered either uncultured, unnaturally powerful or immoral. Within such imbalanced visual economy, portraiture was a problematic professional pursuit for women to whom such ideals of comportment were thought to apply; and because the behavioural codes focused upon the ocular submission of women to men, especially troublesome to the female portraitist was the heterosexual encounter.

And Rosenthal quotes a diary entry of the biographer James Boswell (1740–1795), dated 18 April 1775, referring to a conversation he had with Samuel Johnson (1709–1784):

He [Johnson] thought portrait-painting an improper employment for a woman. 'Public practice of any art, (he observed,) and staring in men's faces, is very indelicate in a female.'⁵⁰

In one of the famous conduct books published in England in the eighteenth-century, *Whole Duty of Women* (1737), the anonymous author dedicated an entire chapter to the subject, 'Of the Manner of Behaviour towards Men'. Right at the beginning of chapter 7 the significance and power of a glance is made unmistakably clear:

it must engage them to have a perpetual watch upon their eyes, and to remember that one careless glance gives more advantages than a hundred words not enough considered; the language of the eyes being very much the most significant and the most observed.⁵¹

Rosenthal also underlines that the international success of painters like Carriera or later Dorothea Therbusch (1721–1782), Adélaïde Labille-Guillard, Elisabeth Vigée Lebrun or Catherine Read 'flew in the face of the moralists' objections to a woman "staring in men's faces".⁵² Following this discourse regarding a portrait not only as a finished product but analysing it in its process of creation, the relationship between artist and sitter as well as the studio or space where the meeting takes place, become important factors to be aware of.

In Carriera's case, the only morally questionable location could have been her home. As long as she painted at the courts of the king of France, the imperial court in Vienna or even at Crozat's *hôtel* in rue de Richelieu in Paris, the presence of court members or other guests would have turned the intersubjective encounter into a less risky affair. The art practice in public was more easily acceptable for the onlookers

⁵⁰ Rosenthal, 1997, 147.

⁵¹ Rosenthal, 1997, 148, and Anon., 1737, 86.

⁵² Rosenthal, 1997, 148.

and presumably slightly less awkward for the sitters. But how much of what ffolliott called a ‘controlled environment’⁵³ was her home, her studio, where the male sitter was more intimately exposed to the female gaze? Did the unusual situation create tensions between her and her male models pertaining to a society in which conventions and conduct books like the above-mentioned English text, *The Whole Duty of a Woman*, of 1737,⁵⁴ produced and reflected a morally loaded idea of female glances?

Unfortunately, neither Carriera nor any of her clients left any records of the dynamics during her creation of likenesses of her male clients – Spence only left a record of what they were talking about while the artist was creating his portrait⁵⁵ – but Elisabeth Vigée Lebrun did, and her entries show a clear awareness of the reciprocal risks of ocular intersubjectivity: while she was painting, she received admiring looks, full of desire and seductiveness, but she felt shielded by the moral and religious principles of her maternal education.⁵⁶

And even if Carriera, depending on her sexual orientation, could have been more or less easily seduced or at least distracted by her male clients and their glances, from the literal point of view of the men who came to her studio the situation might have entailed a disorienting ambiguity. It seems reasonable to believe that the artist’s mother and/or her sister Giovanna were present during the sittings which most likely sanctioned the space of encounter as it did in the case of Elisabeth Vigée Lebrun.⁵⁷

Another critical aspect of her role as a female painter was that generally, her contemporaries were under the annoying delusion that such women consorted in male circles with uncommon regularity, and might even, as artists, be tempted to follow the lead of their male colleagues and paint nudes of men.

It was of the utmost importance, therefore, that Carriera avoided becoming the object of harmful rumour, malicious tongues and scandal as far as was possible, and to strictly attend to the appearances of propriety, leading an exemplary life and showing impeccable behaviour, especially as she did not have support from a brother or a husband.⁵⁸ Her good friend and colleague Felice Ramelli, who maintained regular and close contact with her, was well aware of the dangers to which his friend was subject. In a letter dated 28 June 1703, he wrote to the artist that he intended in future to address her as ‘M. Jean Carriera’ so as not to compromise her by the large number of letters she, as an unmarried woman, received from a gentleman.⁵⁹

53 ffolliott, 2013, 428.

54 The full title of this anonymous text is *The Whole Duty of a Woman, or, an Infallible Guide to the Fair Sex* (1737).

55 Spence, 1966, 603–6.

56 Rosenthal, 1997, 153.

57 Rosenthal, 1997, 154.

58 Tinagli and Rogers, 2012, 279.

59 Johns links this extraordinary document to the fact that in Rome ‘the highly moralizing tone of the clerical society had recently been reinvigorated by Pope Clement XI Albani to whom Ramelli was thoroughly devoted.’ Johns, 2003, 28–29.

Carriera's self-idealization, which is so evident in her letters and in some of her self-portraits discussed later in this book, her caution, tactics and the control of her behaviour, worked out remarkably well if we take into account that to date we do not have any specific public criticism regarding her private life, her reputation or her morals. Her biographers never mention anything of this type. For an artist who was internationally renowned to the extent she was, someone whom people talked about and discussed at the various European courts, who received a manifold clientele from an impressive number of different countries, and who worked in a city where she could have easily become the target of envious, local painters, it is noteworthy that she managed to live a relatively undisturbed life.

Nevertheless, she was only 'relatively undisturbed', because her personal letters do contain various indications of people chit-chatting in a malicious way, even though the content of the bad-mouthing is revealed only in a few cases. What needs to be underlined is that they never take on the forms of any public scandal of any sort.

Her friend and colleague Ramelli for example wrote a letter on 12 January 1704 with New Year's wishes from Rome. Without giving any details regarding the content of the rumours or what kind of diabolic voice had talked badly about the artist – apparently it was one of her male friends who was the 'little devil' (*petit diable*) – he assured Carriera that she did not have to worry, especially as her virtue had always been above that kind of mean gossip (*méchantes babilleries*).⁶⁰ Another equally vague hint of this kind of chit-chat can be found in another letter from Ramelli, of 6 March 1706, where he mentioned 'a bit of envy' (*le peu d'envye*) regarding her.⁶¹ Much later it was again Ramelli who informed his friend of the fact that a male colleague of hers spread the news that she was another of those artists who had left Venice to go abroad. According to the anonymous voice, she had gone to Düsseldorf where she would have been paid 6,000 talleri, which meant three times as much as Antonio Bellucci (1654–1726) who had left the year earlier to work for the Elector Palatine Johann Wilhelm, until the ruler's death in 1716.⁶²

The most mysterious remarks are included in one of the missives by Niccolò Nicoli. On 13 May 1710, he started his letter talking about a kind of solution to a riddle that in its vagueness resembles the obscurity of an oracle. He also stressed that one did not necessarily take the rumours too seriously. It would appear that Carriera had received an anonymous letter she was not pleased about but could not decipher, or did not quite understand:

If, if you have to give credence to them [the oracles], the insolence came from an idle person that did not have any reason to be against your most illustrious person.

60 See Sani, 1985, I, 74.

61 Sani, 1985, I, 97.

62 Sani, 1985, I, 100.

I notice that he also wanted to leave us a trace of who he is, but as the words are obscure, they need an explanation.⁶³

What follows is his attempt to decode various words that at first sight seem to be incomprehensible but that could give an indication of the author of the insulting words. Having arrived at the conclusion, Nicoli suggested that part of the riddle could hide the name Marco. He wanted to know if she knew anybody of that name and, if not, to simply conclude that the insult stemmed from some idle person, he repeated, who attacked her as he could have done anyone else.⁶⁴

More than once, Carriera herself mentioned wagging tongues regarding her person, never though clarifying for the modern reader what exactly the rumours (*ciance*) were about.⁶⁵

The fact that she eventually left Venice to go to Paris in 1720 seemed to be too much for some of her contemporaries. This unheard-of event, of a woman, even more, a woman artist, from the lagoon deciding to travel to France because of her work, did stir up gossip. The chit-chat in the city apparently got more intense as we find references to some form of malicious deception more often in Carriera's correspondence.

On 10 August 1720, her godfather and notary Gabrieli sent Carriera a long letter in which he reported the latest news from Venice, how things were going, how their acquaintances, including the servants left at the house on the Grand Canal, were doing, and he included some facts regarding business. Eventually, he turned to the artist herself and started commenting about the malicious gossip that he had heard about. With a rather annoyed tone he predicted that those,

I won't speak of those ill-willed ones, but may some of these torpid minds come to bite their lip for they have pleased themselves to say what they wished both about your departure and about who counselled you poorly, including those who have attacked myself. In short, they have spread rumours, wrought as much havoc as they sought to, that my friend [Pellegrini] had never received the commission for the ceiling, and as far as you are concerned, that your works were more appreciated abroad when you stayed in Venice, and nice little things like that. [...] but now it starts eating at them and I hope it will eat at them so much that all their teeth will be consumed.⁶⁶

63 The original reads: „Se, se li deve prestar fede, l'insolenza è provenuta da un ozioso, che non aveva con V.S. Ill.ma alcuna causa. Osservo che anco ha voluto darci una traccia dell'esser suo, ma perché le parole sono oscure, hanno necessità di spiegazione.' Sani, 1985, I, 161.

64 'Ella, dunque, si compiacia di riflettere se conosce alcuno con questa traccia e quando no, giova concludere che l'insulto sia provenuto da un ozioso, che tanto poteva attaccar un'altra, come Lei.' Sani, 1985, I, 161.

65 Sani, 1985, I, 254.

66 'non dirò li malevoli, ma certi di genio torbido s'habbino da morsicare le labbra, perché si sono sodisfatti di dire quando hanno voluto e sopra la vostra partenza e di chi vi ha malamente consigliato, per di che ha tocato a me la mia parte; in somma han seminata quanta zizania hanno voluto: e sopra mio compare che mai

At the beginning, Gabrieli confessed, he would have ranted in the face of what he heard if he did not have firm belief in divine providence, but now, he added, it was also Carriera's enormous glory and success that gave him strength.

But the bad-mouthing continued. Three weeks later, on 31 August 1720, he congratulated the artist, referring once more to her great success in Paris and the applause she had received for her portrait of the king. In view of the unceasing rumours, he commented sympathetically:

The darts of their malice that they shoot are not so much directed against you, because our Carriera is too great, and too difficult to hit, but against the poor Pellegrini who every once in a while gets hurt, as I hear, which causes me more pain than he can feel, but at the end those will bite their lips when they realize, as I hope, that they must take back the lies they spread.⁶⁷

Playing with the meaning of her name, 'Carriera' which translates in English into 'career', he included a flattering pun that would encourage her by underscoring that this kind of bad-mouthing could never do her, or her career, any harm.

And still in September Gabrieli confessed to her mother Alba that the rumours never stopped, and that he continuously had to fight against them, trying to rectify the facts. At the moment, he told her

it was said that you were deeply disgusted with Rosalba [...], to the point that you have abandoned her alone at Crozat's palace moving into the house where Pellegrini stayed whose work shortly afterwards was interrupted, and that Signora Rosalba did not have any work anymore, which led all of you into total poverty, without any assistance, and all you were left in a state of complete unhappiness.⁶⁸

Even if these nasty comments must have been painful and annoying, they most likely were the result of nagging jealousy, of professional envy, as they primarily refer to Carriera's work, to her career; they did not attack her as a person or her lifestyle. And that her colleagues felt threatened by her seemed to be a well-known fact as a letter

haveva da far quella sala, chi sentiva costoro; e sopra di voi, che le vostre opere sarebbero più stimate in paesi esteri, stando voi a Venezia, e altrettante belle cosette. [...] ma adesso principiano a roder il morso e spero roderanno tanto che si consumeranno tutti i denti.' Sani, 1985, I, 377.

67 'i dardi, però, della loro malignità non scoccano tanto contro di voi, perché la nostra Carriera è troppo grande et è difficile il potervi colpire, ma più contro il povero Pellegrini che di quando in quanto lo sento ferito, con il più mio dolore, di quello che può sentir lui, ma al fine costoro poi si morderanno le labra nel veder come spero, inalzata la balla da loro battuta per abbassarla.' Sani, 1985, I, 380.

68 'È stato detto che voi vi siete fortemente disgustata con Rosalba [...], a segno che l'avete abbandonata sola in Ca' Crozat e che siete andata a star col Pellegrini in tempo che poco dopo a lui è restata sospesa l'operazione del suo lavoro, che la S.ra Rosalba non ha più niente che fare, onde attornate tutte senza denari, senza assistenza et in stato infelicissimo. Si può inventare cosa più enorme?' Sani, 1985, I, 382, n. 1.

from Giuseppe Pollaroli in 1734 shows in which he stated that her name was not only intimidating for anybody who paints in Venice but in any place where her works had appeared – that is, anywhere in the entire world.⁶⁹ Attacks against her morals, her personal, intimate life would have been worse.

How delicate the situation of a famous woman was in reality, and how easy it was to ruin her reputation, can be gauged by the way Carriera's younger sister Giovanna was treated. Recanati, who during the stay of the Carrieras in Paris would regularly look after the house and the servants who had remained in Venice, wrote a letter shortly after the family had left the city. On 13 April, he informed Giovanna of the latest rumours that were going around in Venice talking about a fight that Giovanna, while still at home, had had with a certain Madame Cornet. The consequence of the dispute was, according to the gossip, that Cornet's husband and son both had left Venice following Giovanna to Paris.⁷⁰ This type of slander was potentially more threatening as it regarded the moral values of the time: Giovanna was described as a dangerous woman who ruined a marriage and tore apart an entire family.

If we look at the case of Vigée-Lebrun who was accused of a lesbian relationship with Queen Marie Antoinette (1755–1793), or recall one the rumours regarding Angelica Kauffmann about an affair she was accused of having with Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792) it is easy to understand what kind of danger Carriera was exposed to.⁷¹ Also, it suffices to remember once more how Giulia Lama was maltreated by her Venetian colleagues to understand that Carriera must have been more than aware of the risks she and her sisters were taking. She had to find a way to put up with the continuous verbal attacks.

Carriera and her family members sometimes did get quite irritated and encouraged each other not to take the gossip too seriously. In a letter the artist wrote from Modena in 1723 she warned her youngest sister Angela not to listen too much to the gossip as it was not worth it and on top of that, it only led her to hurt and torture herself.⁷² Still, on one occasion Carriera did get hurt. At a certain point, she used her own words to release the accumulated frustration, starting to compose a poem in which she described those *maldicenti* (those who talk badly about something or somebody) as people who look at the world with 'cursed eyes' (*occhi maldetti*) only to see faults and defects.⁷³ It remained unfinished. However, what needs to be underlined is that no matter how unnerving or sometimes insulting the chit-chat regarding the artist became, in the end, none of the talk did any harm to Carriera's reputation or hindered her career or her success.

69 'nome non solo dà soggezione a chi dipinge in Venezia, ma in ogni luogo, dove sono comparse le opere della medesima, vale a dire per tutto il mondo.' Sani, 1985, II, 591.

70 Sani, 1985, I, 365.

71 Regarding Kauffmann's reaction, who accused Nathaniel Hone (1718–1784) of slander, see Rosenthal, 1996, 308–11.

72 See Sani, 1985, I, 440.

73 See Sani, 1985, II, 745.

It was in the face of this reality that Carriera had cleverly built her image of a cold, saintly spinster who also paints. But even if this carefully created image, this astute way of self-fashioning made her lifestyle socially more acceptable, her contemporaries still found themselves in the dilemma of trying to give good reasons for her not becoming a virtuous wife. Among their letters we find different attempts to try to explain her choice: One was that they saw her dominant position in her family and her reluctance to leave its members, particularly her mother, alone as a possible hindrance to a marriage.

When her close friend Crozat, for example, tried to persuade her to undertake a second trip to France, he referred to Carriera's relationship with her mother directly as an obstacle in her life. He showed little understanding for her chosen lifestyle as a single woman. In a letter dated 28 June 1728, he wrote:

I think that I could persuade you, knowing, as I do, your willingness to flatter us that you would gladly enter into all our plans if only Madame your mother was no obstacle. Should you be married, would you not have to part, supposing that you were and that your husband took you to France.⁷⁴

With a husband at her side, he was convinced, the mother obstacle would be removed.

Another of Carriera's regular correspondents, Rapparini, was equally puzzled with regard to the painter's extraordinary life that seemed to be too closely, inextricably linked to her family and to Venice. The famous exchange of letters between Carriera and Rapparini in the year 1710 illustrates even better the level of incomprehension primarily of her male acquaintances, clients or friends. In the context of his bewilderment why she turned down so many invitations to leave Venice, he eventually asked Carriera why she did not travel to England to visit her sister Angela and be celebrated by her many admirers there. His weak attempt at explanation ends with a provocation:

I pity Signora Rosalba who must remain in Venice to comfort her Lady Mother, without knowing that outside of those lagoons there is still a world, men, and bread.⁷⁵

Carriera reacted with annoyance. After accusing Rapparini of naivety, she put him in his place and corrected her correspondent by saying that first, her family was not really any of his business, and second, the world on the other side of the lagoon not

⁷⁴ 'Je crois vous persuader conessant, come je fais, votre bon coeur pour nous flatter que vous entreriez volontiers dans tous nos dessins si Madame votre mère n'estoit pas un obstacle. Si vous estiés mariée ne faudroit il pas vous séparer, suposés que vous l'estes, que ce mari vous mène en France.' Sani, 1985, II, 482.

⁷⁵ 'Compatisco la Sig.ra Rosalba che deve restar per conforto della Signora Madre a Venezia, senza saper che fuori di quelle lagune ancora si trova mondo, huomini e pane.' Sani, 1985, I, 167.

only had bread and men to offer, but also women. Moreover, she wrote, she was not particularly interested in men.

You, besides, have no reason to wonder, when you consider the constitution of our family. [...] You must also be certain that I know very well that even outside of the Lagoons there lies a world of men and women, but that I am conforming to the will of Heaven which has ordered that my travels go no further than this table and that I content myself with a little bread. Also, as far as men go, believe this great truth: that there is nothing in the world that concerns me less than them.⁷⁶

Whether this 'great truth' was intended as pure provocation or whether it reflects a different truth that nobody talked or knew about and regarded her sexual orientation, can only be speculated. The wording, however, is stunningly strong.

At the close of her letter, she completely belittled Rapparini by referring to him in the third person, claiming she only deigned to accept him because of his wife Margherita, a claim that might imply more than an element of playful provocation:

I would not make exception of Signor Rapparini, were it not that I consider him the husband of Signora Margherita, great patroness, which requires me to show toward her, as I am towards Your Lord/Ladyship, all veneration.⁷⁷

After this, Rapparini tried very hard to excuse himself, also extract himself from the situation, though with little dexterity:

I should not have to answer to her last letter, for all that it was of the kindest nature, had I not felt obliged to defend what I had written, where I said that beyond Venice there is a world, men, and bread.⁷⁸

Indirectly, he responded to Carriera's admonition by denying that he had misogynous tendencies, and countering that she herself was a misandrist:

By 'men' I meant knowledgeable people who recognize merit and it displeased me to have found she held our sex in so little account, while I remain servant and worshipper of hers.⁷⁹

76 'Lei, poi, non ha a meravigliarsi, quando rifletterà alla costituzione della nostra famiglia. [...] Deve esser certo ancora, che so benissimo ch'anche fori delle Lagune v'è mondo d'uomeni e donne, ma che m'accomodo ai voleri del Cielo ch'ordina che li miei viaggi siano al tavolino e che mi contenti di poco pane, che, in quanto agli huomeni, creda questa gran verità che non v'è cosa al mondo che meno mi dia pensiero.' Sani, 1985, I, 170–71.

77 'Non ecetuerei ne men il Sig.r Rapparini, se non considerassi in lui la metà della Sig.ra Margherita, gran patrona, che m'obliga ad esser così ad ella, come a V.S., con tutta la veneratione.' Sani, 1985, I, 171.

78 'Io non avrei forse che replicare all'ultimo suo, per altro gentilissimo, foglio, se non fosse che mi corre obbligo di difendere lo scritto periodo da me, dove dissi che fuor di Venezia si trovava mondo, huomini e pane.' Sani, 1985, I, 171.

79 'Intesi per huomini, gente conoscitrice e riconoscitrice del merito e spiace mi d'aver trovato in lei poco caso del nostro sesso, sempre tuttavia servo et adoratore del suo.' Sani, 1985, I, 171.

Addressing Carriera also in the third person, his letter, spiced with irony, answered her remarks on his wife by saying:

So, if I hadn't had with me my Signora Margherita, the art which is mine would not have been observed by Signora Rosalba. Oh poor me, who thought himself to be a little in her graces!⁸⁰

Almost as a form of revenge or as though they were playing a power game, he retaliated by reminding Carriera of the importance of the men in her life:

She would be out in the cold, Signora Rosalba, if her virtue were to be judged solely by the taste of women. Princes, Monarchs and Electors have noticed it, they welcome her in their cabinets and garnish them with gems so that if I were of that rank, I would want to do otherwise.⁸¹

One can only hypothesize as to whether Carriera was truly struck or even wounded by this rather indiscreet reference, considering the fact that she was calculating and cool when it came to choosing powerful or influential men as her partners in conversation or in business. Her strategy to achieve fame and success led to the unusual situation in which these very men came to her and not her to them, also without her being dependent on them. In Carriera's private life, these men were, at best, friends, customers or agents, but never potential partners, as she pointed out herself, and in her studio, she only worked with women.⁸² Carriera did, as was typical for women artists of the time, take pupils and assistants of her own sex;⁸³ she employed a number of women to support her in her work and help deal with the immense number of commissions she received.⁸⁴ In addition to her younger sisters Giovanna, and for a short period also Angela, we only find mention of the names Felicita Sartori, Marianna Carlevarijs (1703–post 1750) and the sisters Margherita and Maria Terzi.⁸⁵ And Margherita seemed to have stayed and worked for Carriera until the very end, as proven by a letter that Katherine Read sent on 22 July 1756 asking the artist to greet

80 'Dunque, se io non avessi in me mezza la sig. Margherita mia, quella arte ch'è mia, non sarebbe osservata dalla Sig. Rosalba. O poveraccio me, che mi credeva un po' in grazia!' Sani, 1985, I, 171–72.

81 'Starebbe fresca, la Sig.ra Rosalba, se dal gusto delle donne sole dovesse esser giudicata la sua virtù. Principi, Monarchi ed Elettori fanno caso di essa, l'accolgono ne' gabinetti ed ornano di gemme e s'io fossi di questo rango, vorrei far altro.' Sani, 1985, I, 172.

82 Limentana Virdis, 1996, 26.

83 Borzello, 2000, 69. Elisabetta Sirani and Mary Craddock Beale (1632–1699) were among the earliest women artists to have female students; see De Girolami Cheney et al., 2009, 95.

84 Henning and Marx, 2007, 57. With respect to Marianna Carlevarijs, see Bottacin, 1996, 156–63.

85 Regarding the Terzi sisters, to whom Carriera left some money, accounted for in the post-mortem inventory of 1757, see Moretti, 2011b, 314–15. As far as Carriera's testament is concerned, written on 18 February 1753, both Margherita and Maria were promised 200 ducats. In the same document, we find the names of Giulia and Felicita who 'are at this moment in my services', as specified by the artist; Sani, 1985, II, 727. It is reasonable to believe that the Terzi sisters also served in the household.

and compliment Margherita for her, to whom she wanted to send some paper as soon as she had an occasion to do so.⁸⁶ After the death of Giovanna, Angioletta, the younger sister of Felicita Sartori, became part of the workshop. It is equally significant that Carriera not only taught her own students in the workshop but sought out and supported female painters in Italy and abroad like Katherine Read, Angelica Le Gru Perotti (1719–1776) and Giovanna Fratellini Marmocchini Cortesi (1666–1731).⁸⁷

It was a female world she was surrounded by.

Another rather desperate way to explain her unusual lifestyle of remaining unwed was to use her physical appearance, her alleged lack of attractiveness.

Evidently, Carriera's personal appearance was so important to Dézallier d'Argenville that he opened his biography of 1762, with the following words:

Beauty, which is usually the lot of women, was not at all that of *Signora Rosa Alba Carriera*. This shortcoming, if it is one, was well replaced in her, by qualities her mind & by the superior talents nature had provided her.⁸⁸

Further on, he became even more explicit: 'Moreover, love couldn't divert her from her intended purpose; a woman, under the aegis of ugliness, is saved from lovers.'⁸⁹

The following line was penned by the author and historian Edward Gibbon (1737–1794) on 4 July 1764: 'One must admit that she is not worshipped as are her companions, as far as beauty goes.'⁹⁰

In a similar vein, Anton Maria Zanetti the Younger (1706–1778) wrote in 1771 that she was not pretty, but that she possessed inner values instead: 'Just as nature was miserly in her external gifts all the more did she endow her with very rare internal talents which she cultivated with every care.'⁹¹

In a meeting at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Padua on 6 December 1781, Girolamo Zanetti read out a eulogy in honour of Carriera, in which he focused primarily on her talent, recalling her success as an artist. The eulogy contained the following lines, and a further episode involving her appearance that has been handed down:

86 See Sani, 1985, II, 734.

87 Sani, 2007, 56. As far as her support of Fratellini is concerned, see the letter she wrote to Carriera on 12 March 1728, in Sani, 1985, II, 485–86.

88 Translation by Dabbs, 2009, 344. The original text reads: 'La beauté qui est le partage ordinaire des femmes, ne fut point de la *Signora Rosa Alba Carriera*. Ce défaut, si c'en est us, fut bien remplacé en elle, par le qualités de l'ame, & par les talens supérieurs dont la nature l'avoit pourvûe.' Dézallier D'Argenville, 1762, 314.

89 Translation by Dabbs, 2009, 344. The original text reads: 'D'ailleurs, l'amour ne pouvoit la détourner de sa destination, une femme, sous l'égide de la laideur, est à l'abri des amans.' Dézallier D'Argenville, 1762, 314. In a similarly denigrating way he also commented on the physical appearance of Elisabeth-Sophie Chéron (1648–1711) and Maria Sibylla Merian (1647–1717); see Dabbs, 2008, 39.

90 The original text reads, quoted by Pavanello, 2007a, 57: 'Bisogna ammettere che non si è adulata come le sue compagne, per quanto riguarda la bellezza.'

91 'Quanto avara le fu natura negli esterni doni tanto più colmolla d'interne doti rarissime; cui ella coltivò con ogni cura.' A. Zanetti, vol. 5, 1771, 448.

Nature is mother to us all, but she is not prodigal with all her gifts, and precisely for this she does not usually give everything to everybody. She gave Carriera sublime talent, beauty however she did not bestow upon her, indeed it seems that in exchange for her liberal gift of that, she deprived her altogether of this last. Thus did the Emperor Charles VI turn to his court painter, whose last name was Bertoli and whose homeland was Friuli – who was presenting her to him, She may be worthy, Bertoli mine, he said, this painter of yours, but she is very plain. Carriera, who knew her own physiognomy only too well, heard him, and discretely smiled, because she knew equally well the plainness of others and among these those of this august monarch, with whom in this matter of beauty Nature had been no less stingy, as everyone knows.⁹²

Her colleague Giulia Lama was described by the scientist and intellectual, Abate Antonio Schinella Conti (1677–1749) with the same stereotypical and misogynistic approach: in one of his letters he wrote to Madame de Caylus, Marthe-Marguerite Le Valois de Villette de Mursay, Marquise de Caylus (1673–1729), dated 1 May 1728, describing the artist Giulia Lama as being as ugly as she was witty:

I have just discovered a woman here who paints better than Rosalba, as far as large compositions go. [...] her name is Giulia Lama [...]. While true that her ugliness matches her wit, still she speaks with grace and refinement, so that her face is easily forgiven her.⁹³

92 'La Natura è madre comune, ma non è prodiga di tutti i suoi doni, e per questo appunto dar tutto a tutti non suole. Diede alla Carriera sublime talento, bellezza però non le diede, anzi pare che in cambio del liberal dono di quelli, ne la privasse in tutto di questa. Rivoltosi però l'imperatore Carlo VI ad un suo pittore di corte, di cognome Bertoli e di patria friulano, che gliela presentava, Sarà valente, Bertoli mio, dissegli, questa tua pittrice, ma ella è molto brutta. La Carriera, che troppo conosceva la propria fisionomia, lo udì, e di soppiatto sorrise, perché molto bene conosceva del pari le altrui bruttezze, e fra queste quella ancora di quell'augusto monarca, cui in fatto di bellezza non era stata meno avara la Natura, come tutti sanno.' G. Zanetti, 1818, 18–19. Also Fidière, who based his account of Carriera on Vianelli's publication of her diaries, described the artist once more as not pretty at all but 'sweet and nice'. According to him she was sought after everywhere thanks to her modesty and sympathy. The original reads: 'Point jolie, mai d'une figure douce et sympathique, sa modestie et sa grâce la faisaient partout rechercher.' Fidière, 1885, 23.

93 Between 1727 and 1729, Conti held regular correspondence with Mme. de Caylus sending her almost ninety letters from Venice. The original text reads: 'Je viens de decouvrir ici une femme qui peint mieux que Rosalba pour se qui regarde les grands compositions [...] elle s'appelle Julia Lama [...]. Il est vrai qu'elle a autant de laideur que d'esprit mais elle parle avec grâce et finesse, ainsi on lui pardonne aisement son visage.' See Pallucchini, 1970, 161; Delpero, 2011, 85. Much later, we still find the following comments about Isabella Stewart Gardner (1840–1929) from contemporaries: 'though she was not beautiful she produced the effect of beauty.' One of her friends, Elsie de Wolffe, also expresses herself in a similar way: 'one never heeded her lack of beauty because of the radiant mentality and understanding heart behind it.' Quoted by Sidlauskas, 2008, 188. About the quest for beauty as an aesthetic-social system since the Renaissance, see Nahoum-Grappe, 1993.

The same fate of an ‘unforgiving face’ befell Carriera’s younger colleague Katherine Read who was described by the author Fanny Burney (1752–1840) as follows:

Miss Reid is shrewd and clever when she has any opportunity given her to make it known; [...] She is most exceedingly ugly, and of a very melancholy, or rather discontented, humour.⁹⁴

Likewise, Angelica Kauffmann, who was referred to by one of the most influential German writers and philosophers, Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), as an ‘extremely simple’ woman ‘without physical charms.’⁹⁵

Even Malamani, who recounted at the beginning of the twentieth century the famous anecdote in which Emperor Charles VI had made rather disrespectful comments about the artist’s appearance, described Carriera thus:

While her face is not beautiful and her form low and squat, her wide brow and her intelligent eye would emerge at a first meeting, and this impression would carve itself deeply in the mind of whoever conversed with her.⁹⁶

And further on Malamani remarks:

In spite of the exterior defects of her person, she arose true passions among men, which, far more than in the fleeting splendour of beauty, take hold and sustenance from the light of the soul and of vivacity of mind.⁹⁷

These comments reiterate a stereotype already prevalent in the Renaissance and reflect certain helplessness on the part of some of her male observers as an intellectual difficulty dealing with an exceptional female and social anomaly such as Carriera, who continued to shake up her male observers’ world view.⁹⁸ It is a helplessness that goes beyond their basic misogynistic tendencies. The artist’s lack of beauty apparently serves to lessen her exceptional abilities and talent and cut her success down to size, making her in their eyes more comprehensible and acceptable. Indirectly, the earlier passages I quoted reveal the tendency in the eighteenth century to

94 Greer, 2001 [1979], 278.

95 Quoted after Rosenthal, 2007, 13.

96 Malamani, 1910, 97. See also Malamani’s comments at the end of his book where he repeats the same stereotype himself; 97–98. Even Levey makes similar remarks on her physical appearance: ‘She was plain to the point of ugliness.’ Levey, 1959, 140. Or later on: ‘However disappointing she might be as an incarnation of a woman herself, she did not disappoint taste in the women of her pastels’; 145.

97 Malamani, 1910, 98. See also Viallet, 1923, 59.

98 Dabbs, 2008, 29–30; 2009, 340. With regard to the importance of the appearance of women between 1500 and 1800, see also Matthews-Grieco, 1993, 55–63; C. King, 1993, 381, 391 and 405.

describe female artists as either chained to their homes, or in some ways masculine, in order to underscore the fact that they were different.⁹⁹

Only a miracle seemed to offer Malamani a sufficient explanation for Carriera and her life.

Given the universal ignorance of women of that century and of artists in every century, she, who spoke and wrote, beside her own, the Latin language and French, played the harpsichord and the violin rather well and sang sweetly; she, who was educated in the history of art and of literature, who spoke on any subject with judgment and a limber sense of humour – appeared to be a miracle.¹⁰⁰

Inseparable from the dilemma of trying to explain her talent, her male observers were led by her physical appearance or some kind of supernatural condition of hers to actually compare her to a man, a strategy and trope that had traditionally been used in the context of women painters since the Renaissance.¹⁰¹ And the fact that Carriera was not married also helped in this context. As Katherine Rogers has pointed out, already in 1982 in her study of eighteenth-century feminism in England: ‘women could be strong and rational, therefore equal to men, only through rising above their sexual nature.’¹⁰²

Artistic excellence and being a woman did create a paradox as far as gendered expectations were concerned. Also ffolliott confirms:

cross-gender appraisals were employed to prove that certain women were ‘marvels’, outstripping expectations for their sex. [...] Significantly, such remarks both maintain the status quo and create a special space for those women who are seen to transcend gender norms and display some of the male-associated virtues.¹⁰³

Contemporaries of Carriera returned on several occasions to the same trope. On 6 January 1719, Crozat wrote about a possible journey of Carriera’s:

It is true that this sort of voyage proves tiring for a lady. All the same, we have witnessed many who come and go from Paris to Italy without feeling inconvenienced.

99 Dabbs, 2009, 340.

100 Malamani, 1910, 97.

101 See for example Parker and Pollock, 2013, 8. Another famous example is the quote from one of Artemisia Gentileschi’s letters she sent to Don Antonio Ruffo in Messina: ‘I think [...] you will find the spirit of Caesar in this soul of a woman.’ Garrard, 1989, 397.

102 Rogers, 1982, 216. And Greer noticed as early as in 1979: ‘To be truly excellent in art was to be de-sexed, to be a woman only in name, to inhabit a special realm that no other woman could enter, to be separated from all other women, or it was to express true femininity in grace, delicacy, sweetness and so forth, and be condemned to the second rank.’ Greer, 2001 [1979], 75.

103 ffolliott, 2013, 425.

You have several of them in Venice, therefore, Mademoiselle, you, who show none of the weakness of women and who are worth more than a hundred men, I exhort you to make this trip even this year and to take advantage of the warm spring weather to start along the route of Loreto.¹⁰⁴

Francesco Algarotti wrote a report on her paintings purchased on behalf of August III, in which he said: '[Her] works showed that in a female person there sometimes lies virile spirit.'¹⁰⁵

Charles-Nicolas Cochin noted in his *Voyage d'Italie*, in 1773:

Mademoiselle Rosalba having chosen to work in pastels and miniatures, has raised these to such a high degree of merit that not even the most celebrated men have surpassed her in these genres, but moreover that very few can even be compared to her.¹⁰⁶

And at the beginning of the twentieth century, Malamani wrote about Carriera's return to Venice and her exhausting time in Paris:

Yet the painter had sensed that she could not bear much longer this extraordinary effort, capable of wearing down the fibre even of a hardy man, let alone that of a little lady like her, for all that she was healthy and strong.¹⁰⁷

Even faced with her traumatic eye disease towards the end of her life, Malamani wrote, she was as strong as Hercules.¹⁰⁸

It is worthwhile underlining again that the caricature of the artist by Anton Maria Zanetti (Figure 27) shows her with clearly stubble around her mouth.¹⁰⁹ The drawing points at the same time to a more general tendency that went far beyond comparing talented and successful women with men. Female artists in the eighteenth century moved in a sort of social limbo that had a negative effect on the way in which others perceived them.

As Ugo Foscolo wrote, they were regarded almost as 'isolated freaks of nature'.¹¹⁰

104 'Il est vray que ces sortes de voyages sont fatigans pour une dame. Cependant, nous en voyons plusieurs qui vont et viennent de Paris en Italie sans en estre incomodées. Vous en avés plusieurs à Venise, aussy, Mademoiselle, vous, qui n'avez rien de la foiblesse des femmes et qui valés mieux que cent hommes, je vous exorte à faire ce voyage dès cette année et de profiter de la belle saison du printemps en commensant par la route de Lorette.' Sani, 1985, I, 345.

105 Malamani, 1910, 96. See also Dézallier d'Argenville, who wrote about her virile, elevated style; 1762, 316.

106 'Mademoiselle Rosalba s'étant attachée aux talens du pastel & de la miniature, les a portés à un si haut degree de mérite, que non seulement les homes les plus célèbres dans ce genres ne l'ont point surpassée, mais même qu' il en est bien peu qui puissent lui être comparés.' Cochin, 1773, 160.

107 Malamani, 1910, 53.

108 Malamani, 1910, 94.

109 Concerning the relationship between the friends, see Barcham, 2009, 147–56.

110 Borzello, 1998, 32.



Figure 27 Anton Maria Zanetti, *Caricature of Rosalba Carriera*

1720–30, brown ink on paper, 9 × 6.9 cm. Venice, Fondazione Giorgio Cini. © Fototeca della Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice/Matteo de Fina.

But women of such celebrity are rare in Italy, and are looked upon not so much with respect as with wonder, as monsters of talent, nor are they privileged against the inexorable pains and penalties of ridicule.¹¹¹

Regarding public opinion of Carriera's decision not to marry, it must be noted that although some regarded it with surprise and perplexity, others expressed their admiration and interest. Worthy of note in this respect is a letter of 5 June 1739, in which

¹¹¹ The original text, available in the *Biblioteca digitale Italiana, Università degli Studi di Roma 'La Sapienza'*, was published in English in the *London Magazine* with the title 'The Women of Italy' in 1826. See also Giuli, 2009.

Rosana Pozzola wrote from Vicenza to Carriera and reported that she had begun working for Antonio Dei Pieri as an artist:

as my demerits and bad fate, have not allowed me to come under Yr. Most Illustrious Ladyship, I have made every possible effort to submit myself to this Gentleman. Believe me that there has been no other motive, than that I have been persevering in drawing, that I have determined that I do not wish to marry, besides, having, up to now, such little fortune that I don't know how I have stayed with this opinion, but considering my state, possessing but little fortune, I have devoted myself with every possible energy, if I can do so much as obtain some merit, without desiring that of my brother, having learned from experience that, over much time, we all get bored, even if we are siblings. I think you will take pleasure in this resolution of mine and will judge it excellent, my knowledge of the love and goodness you have shown me up to now has given me the courage to mention this household. Honour me with benign compassion while in saluting you devotedly I protest myself to be always, as I write below [...].¹¹²

It is manifestly evident how much she saw Carriera as a role model, not only in her artistic career, but also in her decision not to marry, and how Rosana hoped for at least moral support in this respect.¹¹³ Something which met with spiritual opposition on the one hand was on the other expected to serve as a guiding light and role model for emancipated women.

And Carriera must have been aware of some of her contemporaries taking her life and career as a guideline, and, surprisingly, not only women. Interestingly, many men seemed not to feel threatened by Carriera's artistic mastery, neither did they find it humiliating to emulate a woman, or to have to ask for help from a woman regarding painting.

What I mentioned above regarding her French colleagues who were more deeply impressed by her art than the other way round, was also noticed by Crozat. In a letter written in 1727 he mentioned various painters who imitated her, among whom he nominated nobody less than Antoine Coypel himself.¹¹⁴ And also Massé is known to have copied miniatures from Carriera.¹¹⁵

¹¹² 'già che il mio demerito e la mia cativa sorte, non [h]a volto che venchgi soto di V.S. Ill.ma, mi son sforzata di far tutto il possibile di andar almeno soto a questo Signor. Mi chreda che non è stato altro motivo, che son stata perseverante nel disigniare, che haver fisato, di non volermi maritare, per altro, [h]o avuto, sino ad ora, tanta poca fortuna, che non so come mi sii mantenuta in questa opinione, ma pensando al mio stato, essendo di povere fortune, mi son data con tuto il sforzo possibile, se poso far tanto di procacciarmi il merito, senza bramarlo dal fratele, avendo imparato per esperienza, che, col lungo tempo, tutti si viene a stufar, ben che sii frатели. Chredo che lei averà piacere di questa mia risuluzione e la aproverà per otima, il saper l'amore e la bontà, che a autto sino adora per me, mi a dato il coraggio di notificarli questa casa. Mi onori di un benigno compatimento e col riverirla divotamente mi protesto di eserli per sempre, qual mi soschivo [...]' Sani, 1985, II, 648. See also Sama, 2009, 129.

¹¹³ See also Sutherland Harris and Nochlin, eds., *Women Artists*, 1976, 93.

¹¹⁴ Sani, 1985, II, 464 and 481.

¹¹⁵ Holck Colding, 1953, 129.

In 1731, another ambitious artist from Paris, who signed his letters with 'Gueffier' and who had travelled to Venice, where he probably met Carriera, regretted that he could not stay longer in order to take advantage of her lessons.¹¹⁶ And the same year, in July, the artist received a letter from Vienna in which Johann Adam Wehring expressed his wish to learn the technique of pastel painting from her.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, on various occasions Carriera's correspondence proves that her pieces were copied by men, like the letter Pietro Petroni Caldana wrote on 9 August 1711 in which he let the painter know that he had copied some of her portraits to improve his own art.¹¹⁸

Ambitious painters regularly declared that they wanted to learn from her, that they copied her pieces, or they asked directly for professional advice. Carriera's answers that have survived show an artist who seems to have been quite generous as far as the sharing of her knowledge is concerned. At the same time, based on personal experience she was well aware of the difficulties a woman had to face when trying to become an artist, which might have turned her into a helpful and available source of information for numerous females who met or who contacted her.

In 1719, Margherita Bononcini, wife of the composer Giovanni Bononcini wrote from Rome asking Carriera for advice about the use of ivory for pastel paintings.¹¹⁹ The artist's reply shows how generously she would share her knowledge and experience. She gave Bononcini advice on how to mix colours for the skin and included special paint brushes she could use for her miniatures.¹²⁰ Another example is the Princess of Rocca Colonna in Palermo who received teachings from the Venetian expert.¹²¹

In April 1735, Carriera received a letter from Florence, written by the art historian and collector Francesco Maria Nicolò Gabburri (1676–1742) to thank her for having been so generous as to offer sound advice to Giovanna Messini (1717–1742) and to send an entire box of pastel sticks when he had asked only for some single pieces.¹²² About six weeks later, Gabburri sent some sketches of his protégée to Venice asking Carriera for her opinion and her professional expertise. As Messini would have desired to become a student of hers, he underlined; he also included a self-portrait by the young artist.¹²³

Besides her personal decision to remain single, Carriera's interest in emancipatory discourses might have played a role as well. That she was indeed curious about these debates, even familiar with some of the writings can be seen in the remarkable fact, already mentioned earlier, that she had read Judith Drake's *Essay in Defence of the*

¹¹⁶ Sani, 1985, II, 543.

¹¹⁷ Sani, 1985, II, 555.

¹¹⁸ Sani, 1985, I, 190.

¹¹⁹ Sani, 1985, I, 351.

¹²⁰ See Sani, 1985, I, 354.

¹²¹ See Sani, 1985, II, 454 and 501–2.

¹²² Sani, 1985, II, 599.

¹²³ Sani, 1985, II, 601.

Female Sex, published in 1669, and had even translated parts of it.¹²⁴ Drake's treatise is part of the *querelle des femmes* debate that by the end of the sixteenth century 'had been consuming a steady stream of ink in Italy and Europe for over a hundred years'.¹²⁵ And interestingly enough, since the late Middle Ages, Venetian women had been contributing a significant number of literary works to the debate.¹²⁶ Two of the best known treatises and first substantial full-length works by Italian female writers on the intellectual and moral equality of women with men were both published in Venice in the year 1600. One is Modesta Pozzo's (1555–1592) *Il merito delle donne* (The worth of women), which was published posthumously under the pseudonym Moderata Fonte, by Domenico Imberti. The other one was written by Lucrezia Marinella (1571–1653), daughter of Giovanni Marinelli, doctor and philosopher who himself had already been involved in the feminist discussions of his time.¹²⁷ Lucrezia Marinella expressed her ideas in *Le nobiltà e l'eccellenza delle donne co' difetti e mancamenti di gli huomini* (The nobility and excellence of women with the defects and deficiencies of men).¹²⁸ These texts, which have received extensive scholarly attention, are considered to be the first substantial defences of women written by women in Italy.¹²⁹

Another protagonist among the Venetian female authors who argued the case for the recognition of women's intellectual and moral equality is Arcangela Tarabotti (1604–1652). From the walls of her convent, she addressed her contemporaries by writing a series of tracts and letters in which she discussed the condition of women and the new ideal of an uncloistered, sociable and creative single life for women.¹³⁰

124 Del Negro, 2009, 83. Cole wrote the following lines to Carriera, which cannot be precisely dated and which probably refer to a copy of Drake's *Essay* that he had given the artist: 'Madam, when you shall well understand the book I send you, the world will say you are a good scholar, and I a good Master.' Sani, 1985, II, 751. See also Del Negro, 2007, 38, n. 44. The notes written by Carriera, 'A proposito degli studi femminili' (Regarding feminine studies; in Sani, 1985, II, 738–39), are a translation of the first six pages of Drake's *Essay*. Regarding the *querelle des femmes* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Italy, see Rebecca Messbarger's introduction to Messbarger and Paula Findlen, eds., *Contest for Knowledge* (2005), as well as the first chapter of the same publication called 'The Italian Enlightenment Reform of the *Querelle des Femmes*', by Margaret King and Albert Rabil Jr., pp. 1–22.

125 V. Cox, 1995, 514.

126 See for example Maddalena Scrovegni (c.1356–1429) and the short treatise that Lombardo della Seta (d.1390) dedicated to her, *De quibusdam memorandis mulieribus* (Of some memorable women). Benussi, 2014, 16–19.

127 Her real name was Lucrezia Marinella Vacca; she worked under the pseudonym Lucrezia Marinelli. See also Patricia Labalme, 'Venetian Women on Women: Three Early Modern Feminists' (1981).

128 The first edition was revised and expanded in 1601 and 1621; V. Cox, 1995, 513. See also Paola Malpezzi Price and Christine Ristaino, *Lucrezia Marinella and the 'Querelle des Femmes', in Seventeenth-Century Italy* (2008).

129 In her revealing article 'The Single Self: Feminist Thought and the Marriage Market in Early Modern Venice' (1995), Virginia Cox points out the new approach of Lucrezia Marinella and Moderata Fonte: unlike their predecessors, the authors reflect not only upon the equality of men and women but contemplate ways in which women, seen as a sociological group, might free themselves from their dependence on men and extend their energy and talents into the public sphere. For the first time, the authors envision effective equality between the sexes. V. Cox, 1995, 513–81. See also Dialetti, 2011, 3–6.

130 V. Cox, 1995, 558–75.

Six of her books were published during her lifetime among which *La semplicità ingannata* (Innocence betrayed) and *L'Inferno monacale* on forced claustration are probably the most memorable writings.¹³¹

Chiara Varotari, a painter herself, founded a school in Venice to train female artists and was also highly recognized as an advocate for women rights, which resulted in her feminist writings such as *An Apology for the Female Sex*.¹³²

It is difficult to imagine that Carriera, a well-educated woman and a literate conversationalist who was surrounded by the intellectual elite of Venice and of all of Europe, would have remained untouched by the debate. She herself took part during this important transitional period in the discourse about women that 'produced a uniquely large and commanding body of learned women active in every sphere of intellectual endeavour, she was a member of a female intelligentsia that was, remarkably, not limited to the aristocratic class',¹³³ which suggests not only her high cultural level but also a certain awareness of the feminist discourses of her time. Nonetheless, without more specific research or documentary proof, one can only speculate about the degree to which she was familiar with the pioneering full-length works and ideas of some of the numerous authors of texts regarding the *querelle des femmes*.

Regarding a further hypothesis about Carriera's decision not to marry, it is impossible to know, and fruitless to conjecture, whether she remained single more because of her desire to be an emancipated independent woman or because of her sexual orientation. Either conjecture would distract attention from one highly significant fact: marriage was never a real alternative for Carriera. For female artists of her time, marriage as a means of climbing the social ladder was only conditionally possible. Generally speaking, the professional career of the woman artist was hampered rather than helped by marriage, and as a consequence, as Modesti notes in her book on the Bolognese painter Elisabetta Sirani, 'many women artists, once married, more often than not, abandoned their professions'.¹³⁴

Carriera's career would have been obstructed quite considerably. Actually, had she married, it would have been her husband, not her, who would have benefited from her fame, her success and her fortune.¹³⁵ By renouncing marriage, on the other hand, she was able to safeguard her intellectual and artistic autonomy, which made up for the loss of social advancement.¹³⁶ Simply put, as Chambers-Schiller's book title suggests: 'Liberty, a better husband'.¹³⁷

¹³¹ Hufton, 1995, 372–73.

¹³² See also De Girolami Cheney et al., 2009, 79–80.

¹³³ Messbarger, 2002, 7.

¹³⁴ 'Given the legal power of husbands over wives, spinsterhood combined with help from a father or sister was often a more productive option than marriage.' Borzello, 1998, 30. Regarding Sirani, see Modesti, 2014, 33.

¹³⁵ Johns, 2003, 27. In terms of marriage as an obstacle to a female artist's career, see also Sutherland Harris, Sutherland Harris and Nochlin, eds., *Le grandi pittrici* (1979), 29.

¹³⁶ Limentana Virdis, 1996, 22.

¹³⁷ See Lee Virginia Chambers-Schiller, *Liberty, a Better Husband: Single women in America; The Generation of 1780–1840* (1984).

In point of fact, it seems that Carriera constructed for herself a functioning network of prominent men and women from all spheres of influence, including aristocrats, ambassadors, artists, intellectuals and businessmen and -women, using these contacts for the social leverage they offered, interacting with them on all levels and even exerting her own influence.¹³⁸ Looking at the number of portraits of Venetians that Carriera executed, it is interesting to note that she painted more Venetian women than Venetian men.¹³⁹ Until the end of the 1720s about ten to twelve portraits of patrician ladies can be found. In old age she added at least another seven to this list which reached a total of roughly twenty. As far as the likenesses of male patricians are concerned, we count only ten, which is about half of the number of women of the same social background in Venice that Carriera depicted. The discrepancy between her contacts with women and men looms larger in perspective if we look at the number of females with whom she shared a social life. Her life and success in Venice, in general, seems to have been more determined and influenced by her contacts with women than with men. Counting the portraits Carriera depicted from foreigners, the proportions change: forty-nine men to eight women.¹⁴⁰

Carriera's affective as well as professional collaborative links with her female circle correspond to what Luisa Moore observed in the context of the relationship between the English artist Mary Delany (1700–1788) and the aristocrat Margaret Bentinck, the Duchess of Richmond (1715–1785):

One aspect of women's increasing participation in art practices of all kinds from the end of the Renaissance onwards seems to be the creation of [female] networks. Women who in many cases denied formal training and professional opportunities shared resources [...] and exchanged the products of their artistic labours.¹⁴¹

The links between Carriera, her pupil Felicita Sartori and Luisa Bergalli (1703–1779) reveal three interesting cases of female bonding, each of which exemplify these complexities as they pertained to eighteenth-century same-sex relationships. Both Tiziana Plebani in 2003 and especially Catherine M. Sama in 2008 and 2009 have elucidated the professional and personal relationship between the three as an important contribution to 'women shaping culture in eighteenth-century Venice.'¹⁴² Thanks to the cultural situation in the lagoon – which prompted Caroli to call it the 'Queen of the seventeenth century'¹⁴³ – numerous Venetian women who were aware of their

¹³⁸ Regarding the relationship with the aristocracy of her city, see Del Negro 2009, 56–66.

¹³⁹ Sani's catalogue from 2009 is at the basis of the following observations by Del Negro.

¹⁴⁰ Del Negro, 2009, 66–73.

¹⁴¹ L. Moore, 2011, 11.

¹⁴² Plebani, 2003, 47–48; Sama, 2008, 59–75; Sama, 2009, 125–50. See also Oberer, 2014, 63–68.

¹⁴³ Caroli, 2003, 7.

abilities and opportunities were able to distinguish themselves in various fields.¹⁴⁴ This environment could only prove beneficial to the careers of people such as Luisa Bergalli, who made her mark as a poet, playwright and translator of classic and French literature. With respect to her personal and professional link to the Carriera family, suffice it say that her anthology of Italian authoresses was published in 1726, entitled *Componimenti poetici delle più illustre rimatrici d'ogni secolo* (Poetic compositions by the most illustrious poetesses of every century). At the time, this was the most comprehensive anthology of Italian female writers – as well as the first to be published by a woman.¹⁴⁵ The volume comprises various works of 253 female poets, together with their biographies, including Rosalba's sister, Giovanna Carriera.¹⁴⁶

The ties between the painter, her student and the author also represent instances of female cooperation that these three women used strategically to achieve professional success, by means other than marriage in a public arena otherwise dominated by men.¹⁴⁷ They are also a telling example of how these niches of mutual female support and intimate emotional bonds, turned into such a 'powerful resource in the struggle of autonomy and authority'.¹⁴⁸

144 See Lanaro, 1991, 129.

145 Sama, 2009, 130.

146 Luisa chose two of Giovanna's poems, both of which were composed with a strong religious undertone; see Bergalli, 1726, 224–25. After having been chosen by Recanati to be part of his publication on female poets, this was the second time that Giovanna was included in an anthology.

147 For a summary of the Venetian women who were part of the cultural life of the city, see Molmenti, 1908, III, 456–70.

148 Lanser, 1998–99, 180.

